

SOME PROBLEMS OF SNOW TRAVEL FOR THE BLIND.

By

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## SCHOOL FOR THE BLIND



### SOME PROBLEMS OF SNOW TRAVEL FOR THE BLIND



In light, unpacked snow the student should use a "touch and slide" technique with his cane.

Any type of adverse weather may negatively affect a visually impaired person's ability to travel independently. Wind or heavy rain can impair a person's ability to hear the initial surge of parallel traf-



On an unshoveled walk with semi-deep, packed snow, the student should use the regular "touch techniques", occasionally using a 3-point check to make sure he is on the least-deep, packed path.

fic at an intersection controlled by traffic lights. Even a guide dog does not enjoy traveling in some weather conditions. But snow, with its many variations of depths and wetness, presents many unique problems

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for the visually impaired traveler.

While traveling mid-block, the student may encounter almost any number of situations. The snow may be light and unpacked, which he might handle by applying the "touch and slide" technique. The student should allow the cane to slide an inch or two as he moves the cane back and forth and touches on each side of the arc. If the snow is of medium depth and somewhat packed, he should utilize the regular "touch technique" and check occasionally to the right, left, and in front to verify that he is on the least-deep and most traveled path. If the snow is extremely deep, he may have to resort to traveling along the side of the street and "shoreline" the curb or snowbank alongside him, to ensure that he does not go into the street. When passing a driveway for a gas station, church, or parking lot, he may suddenly come to an unexpected and oftentimes very large snowbank. If a 3-point check does not help dictate which way he should go to quickly get around it, its size and height may determine whether he should merely traverse it or apply given rules to go around. If the snowbank is too large to cross, generally he should go around it by going towards the parallel street. However, if he finds himself going into the parallel street, he may reverse his route to look for an opening or safer way.

In order to cross streets in most snow conditions, the student will also have to cross a snowbank, both at the beginning and ending of a crossing. Snow plows deposit snow along the sides of the street, leaving a snowbank by the curbs. In residential areas, it may be advantageous for the student to cross or at least partially cross the snowbank before he listens to

determine if it is "clear" in the perpendicular street. If he listens for traffic before he crosses the snowbank, he may think it is clear and safe to cross, but by the time he crosses the snowbank to get into the street (which may take 10 or more seconds), a vehicle may be approaching. Crossing snowbanks at the beginning and ending of street crossings takes extra concentration to maintain a straight line of travel. The student should carefully utilize traffic sounds to maintain alignment and the correct distance from the parallel street.



In deep snow where the student is cutting his own path, he may prefer to walk in the gutter and shoreline the snowbank or curb.



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A student encountering a snowbank that had been pushed onto the sidewalk when a driveway was cleared.

Finally, another problem often encountered is locating the correct sidewalk at the completion of a street crossing. In dry weather, there are basically three things that could happen when a visually impaired person crosses a street: 1) He could go straight and hit the intended sidewalk; 2) He could go into the parallel street; or 3) He could go away from the parallel street. In some residential areas, a fourth situation might occur if he contacts a landscaped area near the apex of the corner, between the intended sidewalk and the parallel street. The student is taught how to recognize and recover from each of the veering possibilities. In deep snow conditions, however, there may be a snowbank that continues the entire length of the block and extends out into the parallel street. Upon first encounter, the student may have no idea whether he went straight, away from, or is slightly in the parallel street. Furthermore, the path across the snowbank leading to the sidewalk may be only slightly matted down, and as narrow as one foot across or less. Extra patience and sensitivity with the cane will likely be needed for the student to detect and react to that path in the snowbank. Indeed, snow travel for the blind is an awesome challenge, and takes special training, concentration, and patience.

--- Bryan R. Gerritsen



It is important to maintain a straight line of travel as the student crosses the snowbank on each side of the street, both at the beginning and ending of a street crossing.



Student contending with a large and confusing snowbank deposited by snow plows at the curb.



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